US Army Corps of Engineers ®
San Francisco District

Project Map

BEL MARIN KEYS WETLAND RESTORATION

NOVATO, CALIFORNIA

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS:

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7th District, Rep. George Miller
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9th District, Rep. Barbara Lee
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STUDY DESCRIPTION: The 1610 acre Bel Marin Keys (BMK) Unit V parcel lies adjacent to the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project, in an unincorporated area southeast of Novato, Marin County, California. The parcel is bounded by the existing Bel Marin Keys development and Novato Creek to the north, San Pablo Bay to the east, and Hamilton Army Air Field, site of the Corps' Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project, to the south. The area, currently protected by levees, has subsided below the elevation of the tidal wetlands immediately adjacent to San Pablo Bay. Precipitation and groundwater that collects on the parcel is transferred from the site to San Pablo Bay by a drainage system including a pump station. This wetlands restoration project will further the completion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program to restore, conserve, and manage the fish and wildlife resources within San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, including developing habitat for endangered species. The project will also advance the beneficial use of dredged material from San Francisco Bay as part of the Long Term Management Strategy (LTMS).

The San Francisco Bay Area of California has in excess of 5.4 billion dollars of annual economic activity that is directly dependent on deep and shallow draft navigation channels. Annual maintenance of the navigation channels requires the removal of approximately 5 million cubic yards of dredged material. Pending new channel improvements will result in the removal of another 16 million cubic yards in the immediate future. The LTMS was officially implemented in 1990 because historical in-Bay dredged material disposal sites were filling up, there was no designated ocean disposal site, and dredged material disposal at almost any location was becoming an issue of substantial controversy. The Strategy was created as a partnership between Federal and State agencies, navigation interests, fishermen, environmental organizations, and the general public. Primary objectives are to identify and make available acceptable disposal alternatives and to address the various regional concerns regarding dredging and disposal. The LTMS objectives are being met through developing beneficial reuse sites for environmental restoration.

FISCAL YEAR 03 BUDGET: $0

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: Wetlands would be created with the use of up to 14 million cubic yards of dredged material from San Francisco Bay navigation projects, restoring the site to its original wetlands elevation. The levee would be breached in order to restore tidal action

PRESENT STATUS: Under the 1996 Water Resource Development Act (WRDA 1996, Section 204), an Ecosystem Restoration Initial Appraisal was completed in October 2000. It recommended the BMK property be studied as a potential addition to the Hamilton Wetlands Project currently under construction. The California State Coastal Conservancy, non-federal sponsor for the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project, has acquired the BMK parcel for approximately $16,000,000. A Notice of Intent was published in the federal register on September 21, 2001 initiating the environmental review process so that the BMK parcel may be added to the adjacent authorized Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project.

Due to funding and decision constraints in the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) program and the Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) program, the delivery of dredge material to the Hamilton Airfield and State Lands Commission parcel may be delayed. This has the potential to delay the sequencing of dredge material from the Oakland –50' Project, resulting in disposal of the material at the San Francisco Deep Ocean Disposal Site, and cause O&M dredging material from federal channels to be disposed of at existing aquatic disposal sites in San Francisco Bay. To avoid the loss of dredge material to be used for the construction of tidal marshes, which will benefit endangered species, and prevent aquatic disposal, the most feasible alternative beneficial reuse disposal site is the adjacent BMK site.

FUTURE EFFORTS: To prevent the BRAC and FUDS constraints from causing a significant loss of dredge material slated for beneficial reuse in the Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project, the District and the California State Coastal Conservancy are accelerating the completion of Feasibility level study tasks and a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to support a Post Authorization Change (PAC) document. The PAC is required to authorize BMK for construction as a part of the existing Hamilton Wetlands Restoration Project. The Conservancy expects to use this effort to support adding BMK to the Water Resources Development Act of 2002.